

12th Civil Support Team partners with UNH for successful emergency response exercise

By SGT Andrew Schwab, 114th MPAD

DURHAM – The NH National Guard’s 12th Civil Support Team completed its first joint training exercise with emergency response workers from the University of New Hampshire on July 18 and 19.

Members of the New York National Guard’s CST also participated in the training, which involved two simulated disasters and a day of public demonstrations.

Organizers are using this week’s training to build relationships that will help local responders coordinate affectively with the 12th CST during a real emergency.

Brad Manning, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator and Director of Environmental Health and Safety at UNH, said the 12th CST’s ability to cooperate with UNH emergency personnel was “beyond all of our expectations.”

Manning stressed the importance of teamwork between local responders and state support services like the CST. He believes the improved communication and understanding created by these exercises will be essential in effectively responding to a real disaster.



Members of the 12th CST set up detection equipment during a mock chemical incident at the University of New Hampshire in Durham on July 19. (Photo by Sgt. Andrew Schwab, 114th MPAD)

Manning said the training is helping to build bonds between local and state responders, and he hopes other institutions will take advantage of this kind of training. Representatives from Keene State College observed operations on Thursday, and officials have invited Plymouth State University to be involved in future exercises.

For UNH Chief of Police Nicholas Halias, these training opportunities ensure that everyone knows what needs to be done in an emergency.

“Any type of catastrophe can fall upon us,” Halias said, “We have an obligation. When a parent leaves a student, we will provide a safe environment.”

He emphasized this kind of training must continue in order to maintain a high level of cooperation and understanding between state and local emergency services.

Capt. Erik Fessenden, the 12th CST Operations Officer, says the 12th CST is constantly training and local communities should take advantage of the resources they provide. “We are completely free to local communities,” he said,

Fessenden added that he hopes rescue and emergency service leaders know they can call on the CST at any time.

The 12th CST formed, in part, as a response to the tragedies of 9/11. The threat of another domestic terrorist attack challenged emergency response coordinators to prepare for new risks. New planning included the danger of a nuclear, biological, or chemical attack, and the 12th CST trains specifically to address these issues.

The 12th CST employs 22 full-time NH Army and Air guardsmen and some of the most advanced communication, threat detection and decontamination equipment available. They are always on call, and they train to operate autonomously. From handling and identifying hazardous materials to establishing a complete satellite and radio communication center, the 12th CST can rapidly provide unique and powerful disaster response capabilities for New Hampshire communities.